



Testimony to the Mississippi River Commission
Vicksburg, MS
August 17, 2016

Good afternoon. Thank you General Wehr, members of the Commission, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for allowing our organization to provide testimony here today.

My name is Andrew Gromyer, and I currently serve as the Executive Vice President of the Agricultural Council of Arkansas. Our organization is a non-profit trade association committed to telling the story of row crop agriculture in Arkansas, advocating on behalf of farmers and agriculture businesses, and growing the economies of the communities around us.

Our organization, which was founded in 1939, consists of landowners, farmers, and agriculture related businesses throughout Arkansas. However, most of our membership resides in the Delta Region of Arkansas. Needless to say, our members' businesses and livelihoods are heavily dependent on what the Corps of Engineers provides.

The services of the Mississippi River Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are critical to agriculture and the people of Eastern Arkansas. Flood control, navigation, and recreation all serve critical roles to our economy allowing for some of the most productive lands in the world to produce billions of dollars of economic opportunity while providing the U.S. and our allies with an abundant supply of safe, affordable food and fiber. Continuing to protect and preserve this infrastructure is a matter of national security and should be treated as such by our nation's leaders.

Flood control efforts protect life, property, and our crops. Without the efforts of the USACE millions of people and billions of dollars would be in eminent danger. Flood control systems protect the 3 million people that call Arkansas home, especially in flood prone areas like the Delta Region of the state where most of our state's roughly 6 million acres of row crops are produced. Without proper flood control many farmers would often lose entire crops and the viability to stay in business. The floods of 2011 serve as a fresh reminder of the importance of what you do. On behalf of landowners and farmers across the state we thank you for protecting a way of life and our ability to grow and produce the safe and affordable supply of food and fiber our nation needs.

As you may know, the Arkansas General Assembly in partnership with other state and local government agencies have taken new, earnest steps towards improving our local levee districts and drainage districts. A new law in Arkansas passed earlier this year (Act 7 of the Third Extraordinary Session of 2016) will seek work with county leaders to identify all levee boards and drainage districts in Arkansas and ensure that they are all carrying out their responsibilities to the communities they serve. We look forward to

monitoring the progress made through this new law and continuing to ensure that our local flood control systems are appropriately managed.

Of equal importance to flood control is the navigation service the Corps of Engineers provides our economy, especially here in the Mississippi River and Tributaries system with lock and dam systems and our ports. This network is the envy of the world, and it allows us to efficiently get our commodities to market. This transportation network will always remain vital to agriculture and our state's economy. As the world gets more integrated through trade and commerce, this system will only grow in importance. We must maintain and enhance our navigation infrastructure.

In this regard, we are greatly concerned with the lack of navigability for the White River, which has led to the closure of several Bunge port facilities along the river. This has had a negative economic ripple effect in the markets that previously depended on these facilities. We hope this channel can once again get the maintenance attention it needs from the USACE to serve these types of grain facilities.

In addition to flood control and navigation, the recreation component of what is offered by the Corps of Engineers is of significant importance to Arkansas, and helps us maintain our status as The Natural State, a name in which we take tremendous pride. Hunting, fishing, and wildlife preservation are all things that Arkansans are passionate about as we know that having these natural treasures for recreation are important economically and enhance our way of life. The Corps of Engineers should never lose sight of the important role recreation plays in enhancing livability and wildlife habitat.

Lastly, we share a desire to address environmental concerns with things like water quantity and water quality, and we know that we must work with the Corps of Engineers and others to preserve our water supply, which obviously is critical to agriculture. This said, we strongly oppose the Waters of the U.S. definition change recently released by the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. We believe that the rulemaking runs contrary to Congressional intent and makes enforcement of our clean water laws less effective and far more litigious.

We are doing a number of things proactively to address water concerns, and we'd be more than happy to share these efforts with you in much greater detail in person. We believe in regionally developed, voluntary solutions to address these concerns primarily through best management practices and new technologies that are scientifically proven. We are currently working with multiple partners, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, our land grant institutions, and others to 1) identify water concerns; 2) research potential solutions; and 3) deploy scientifically proven solutions.

We also believe on the water quantity side that, in addition to increasing efficiencies in water use, we absolutely must do more to utilize surface water during times of excess flow to alleviate ground water pressure from users. Projects like the Grand Prairie Project on the White River and the Bayou Meto Irrigation Project on the Arkansas River are prime examples of what we can and must do in order to preserve water quantity for

the sustainability of agriculture in this region. It's important that we allow working farms to continue to operate as they seek to preserve ground so it is productive from year to year, decade to decade, and generation to generation.

In closing, I would like to offer the commitment of our organization to support the Mississippi River Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as it seeks to serve the people and industries of this region. We are here to help at the Congressional level down to the grassroots level to ensure a positive future for Arkansas agriculture and the people of this state. I invite you all to contact us if there is anything we may do to assist you in your mission.

Andrew Grobmyer
Executive Vice President
Agricultural Council of Arkansas